

**PREPARED REMARKS FOR THE  
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM**

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

September 15, 2005

## **INTRODUCTION**

Mr. Chairman, Honorable Committee Members:

Thank you for giving me the privilege of presenting testimony on behalf of the County of Los Angeles. My name is Constance Perett, and I am the Administrator of the County Office of Emergency Management. We sincerely appreciate your desire to examine preparedness levels in large jurisdictions, and we welcome this opportunity to present information on the County's plans and capabilities.

## **LOS ANGELES COUNTY**

Los Angeles County has the largest population and is the most complex county in the United States. Its area encompasses over 4,000 square miles, including mountains, deserts and coastline. Our county has 88 independent cities; 81 school districts; 13 community college districts; numerous special districts; 137 named unincorporated areas; and ten million ethnically diverse people. During the 1990s, the County had the most federally-declared disasters of any jurisdiction in the United States.

Because of the many natural and manmade hazards we face, the County has had an aggressive emergency preparedness program for many years.

## **STANDARDIZED EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

The County uses the California Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) to coordinate and respond to disasters. SEMS is based on the Incident Command System which was developed in California by Firescope in the early 1970s. SEMS provides common functional descriptions, common terminology, and a common organizational structure for the coordination of damage information and resource requests. Under SEMS, the County, also known as the Operational Area Coordinator, serves as the intermediate level of government that coordinates and communicates response needs between the cities within its geographic boundaries and the state. As the OA Coordinator, we also coordinate pre-event planning, training, exercises, and much more with our cities, community-based organizations, utilities, state agencies, and other OA partners. SEMS is an effective system that has served us well for the past ten years. Much of the new National Incident Management System (NIMS) is based on SEMS.

## **COUNTY OPERATIONAL AREA EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER**

Around 1989, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved the development and construction of a state-of-the-art County Emergency Operations Center (CEOC). We broke ground on the facility in 1992, and took occupancy in 1995. The CEOC is base-isolated to withstand an 8.3 earthquake. It has multiple redundant communications systems, fuel, water, emergency generators, audio/video capabilities, and a host of other technical capabilities. The CEOC is designed around the Incident Command System with planning rooms for Operations; Plans and Intel; Logistics; and Finance, Administration, and Recovery.

The CEOC is equipped with an Emergency Management Information System that allows us to communicate directly with all 88 cities plus the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES); County departments; Red Cross chapters; school districts; and other agencies using internet web-based technology. We are able to get rapid reconnaissance reports from our cities, followed by more detailed damage information and resource requests. This ability to communicate with our cities allows us to quickly identify areas of damage and to receive resource requests so that County and mutual aid resources can be sent to the impacted areas.

## **PLANNING AND EXERCISES**

On a day-to-day basis, we coordinate planning and exercises with our 88 cities by working with our Disaster Management Area Coordinators (DMACs). The County is divided into eight Disaster Management Areas and each DMAC works with a consortium of cities within their area to ensure that plans are coordinated with their cities and with the County OA. Our office also coordinates major countywide exercises every year. For the past several years we have concentrated on terrorist-driven scenarios. All 88 cities are invited to participate in each year's exercise program and, over the years, we have engaged almost all our cities to one extent or another in EOC activations, tabletop exercises, and full-scale events. Our program this year includes 36 tabletop exercises and will culminate in three CEOC functional exercises and a full-scale event.

## **COUNTY DEPARTMENTS**

The County has 36 departments that provide a vast array of services to our county's 10 million residents. Many of our departments provide countywide services such as health and public health, public social services, coroner, and mental health. In addition, the County Fire Department is responsible for providing fire protection to approximately 57 of our cities as well as the one million people in our unincorporated areas.

Our Sheriff's Department provides law enforcement protection to approximately 48 cities plus our unincorporated areas. In addition, our Sheriff and Fire departments are the Mutual Aid Regional Coordinators for their respective disciplines. The County operates hospitals, health clinics, libraries, and numerous other public services, all of which must be prepared to provide essential services following emergencies and disasters.

All County departments are required to have department emergency plans that describe how they will continue their non-deferrable services and emergency missions during disasters. All departments must also have building emergency plans to address the life/safety of occupants and visitors to County buildings.

## **PUBLIC EDUCATION**

Public education is an essential component of any emergency preparedness program. The County's award-winning "Emergency Survival Program" was developed in 1989 and provides valuable preparedness information for a wide variety of hazards, including terrorism. It is available on our OA website at [www.lacoa.org](http://www.lacoa.org) and our ESP website at [www.espfocus.org](http://www.espfocus.org). Jurisdictions, disciplines, private and non-profit agencies are all encouraged to put their own logos on our materials. Our goal is to reach as many people as possible with preparedness information. We are best able to do that by making our materials accessible to everyone.

## **COORDINATION IS CRITICAL**

If I were to pick one aspect of emergency preparedness that was the most critical it would be the coordination of plans before disasters and the coordination of response and recovery activities after disasters. The County works very closely with the City of Los Angeles on a regular basis, and we exchange staff in our respective EOCs during activations. We also exchange staff with our State OES partners. I firmly believe that by planning, training, and exercising together before disasters occur, we are far more capable of an effective, coordinated response during disasters.

NIMS implementation is an important part of our nation's plan to coordinate disaster response operations. I am pleased to inform you that the County of Los Angeles has developed a NIMS Implementation Plan and is moving swiftly to integrate NIMS and SEMS for a successful local, state, federal interface.

## **In conclusion**

Although we have a strong emergency management program in our county, there is still work to be done. That is why the County has adopted the credo, "Los Angeles County, Prepared Today. . . Even More Prepared Tomorrow". The County advocates for strong cities, a strong County OA, a strong State emergency management organization, and a strong FEMA. I once saw a quote that I liked so much it is now hanging in my office. It says "None of us is as competent, creative, or resourceful as all of us".

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to present information about the County of Los Angeles' emergency preparedness programs.

